

2002

## **Common Ground - Exploring the Royal National Park - the dramatic common ground shared by southern Sydney and the Illawarra**

Glenn P. Barkley  
glenn\_barkley@uow.edu.au

Tom Sear  
*Liverpool Regional Museum*

Jelle van den Berg  
*University of Wollongong*, jelle@uow.edu.au

Susan Blanchfield  
*University of Wollongong*, sue\_blanchfield@uow.edu.au

Ian Gentle  
*University of Wollongong*, uow\_gentlei@uow.edu.au

*See next page for additional authors*

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## Authors

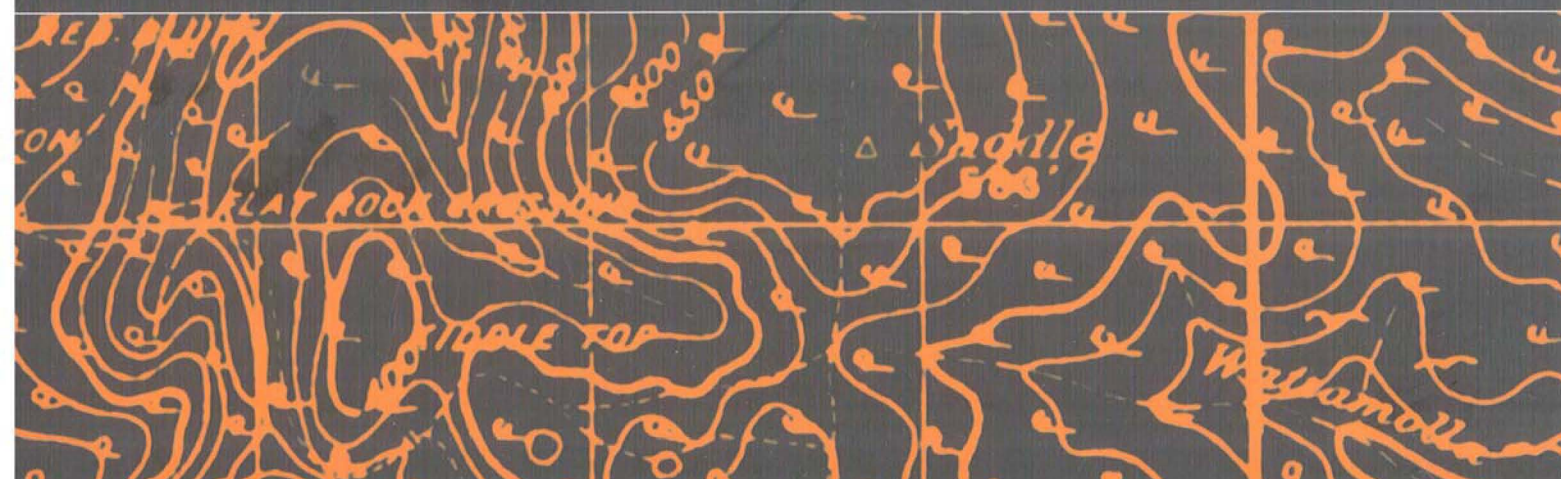
Glenn P. Barkley, Tom Sear, Jelle van den Berg, Susan Blanchfield, Ian Gentle, Gardon Hockey, Liz Jeneid, Idris Murphy, Jacky Redgate, John Wolseley, and Diana Wood Conroy

Hazelhurst Regional Gallery and Arts Centre  
8th June - 4th August 2002

# common ground

Exploring the Royal National Park - the dramatic common ground shared by southern Sydney and the Illawarra

An initiative of the University of Wollongong



Jelle van den Berg

Sue Blanchfield

Ian Gentle

Gordon Hookey

Liz Jeneid

Idris Murphy

Jacky Redgate

John Wolseley

Curator: Glenn Barkley

University of Wollongong Art Collection

# common ground

Exploring the Royal National Park - the dramatic common ground shared by southern Sydney and the Illawarra

University of Wollongong



**Hazelhurst**  
REGIONAL GALLERY & ARTS CENTRE







## foreword

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The University of Wollongong is renowned as a centre of excellence in research and education. It also has an important public role in developing strategic partnerships within the cultural sphere and this exhibition at Hazelhurst Regional Gallery and Arts centre is an example of the type of initiative that reflects the diverse roles of a contemporary University.

The agenda of 'Common Ground' is to explore the physical place that unites the communities of southern Sydney and Illawarra, the Royal National Park. The University of Wollongong has for many years undertaken projects in the scientific realms that seek to bring a greater knowledge and understanding of the Royal National Park to its users, but 'Common Ground' gives a broader view of the Royal National Park, embracing both the visual arts and science, which will inform a contemporary cultural understanding of this rich heritage which we all share. It is a continuing part of a long term liaison over many years with the National Parks and Wildlife Service and will, like the scientific work that has preceded it, increase the community understanding of this unique, spectacular and inspiring region.

The University of Wollongong is pleased to present this exhibition to the people of Sutherland. May it reinforce the important cultural, social and economic rôle the University can play in the development of the area.

**Professor Gerard Sutton**  
**Vice-Chancellor, University of Wollongong**



# introduction

The original concept of this exhibition arose from the very simple desire to investigate and strengthen the existing links between the communities in the South of Sydney and those of the Illawarra by exhibiting in the very handsome Hazelhurst Regional Art Gallery some of the art treasures held in the University of Wollongong Art Collection -- a collection which now ranks very highly in the list of Australian University Collections (and which, if I may be allowed a small commercial, is constantly on view to all students and staff throughout the entire University campus at all times). Among the many highlights of the collections are, inevitably, a significant number of works by artists who are themselves living or working in the Illawarra and nearby regions.

So much for the original intention. While discussing the various links between the two communities the Curator of the Art Collection, Glenn Barkley, pointed out that the most positive link between the South of Sydney and the Illawarra was indeed a very physical one - that marvellous slab of almost virgin bush we call the Royal National Park which binds the two communities and becomes a common backyard for both. And so the idea of this exhibition was born and the focus was directed quite specifically towards the Royal National Park. A group of well-known artists, local and interstate, was invited to work around the general theme of the Park or actually to work within the Park, with the enthusiastic support of the staff of the Royal National Park. Science Faculties within the University, some of which have for many years carried out significant research in the Royal National Park, were also invited to make their own contributions. The results of these investigations by both scientists and artists, all of them

exploring various aspects of the Royal National Park, are on view in this art gallery now. Furthermore, in support of the exhibition there has already been an ongoing series of public workshops in the Park and at the Gallery since October 2001, and talks and public seminars are planned to be held at the Gallery during the course of the Exhibition.

Public thanks should most certainly go to Peter Hay and members of his staff at the Royal National Park, to all the artists, to Associate Professor Dr Diana Wood Conroy and Tom Sear for their catalogue essays, and to all those other members of the University community who have also contributed generously of their time and their energies. And final thanks of course to Professor Gerard Sutton, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Wollongong, for his enthusiastic support.

So -- welcome to your own backyard! We might find objects and ideas there which will astonish us all.

**Dr Guy Warren OAM**  
**Director**  
**University of Wollongong Art Collection**



Set off to the burnt Royal Park to do a giant drawing. A skein of ibis – fifty or so – moved across the sky like a lengthening and constricting rubber band, a wavering calligraphy... And then as Carol and I moved down the ravine between burnt saplings the 12 foot length of paper also became a variable line – a snake contracting or tautening as we moved between the burnt saplings. ...there were gestures, arabesques of tiny charcoal lines fixing both our movements and that of little charcoal twig fingers dragging and flicking back as we passed

John Conroy, 1 January 2002

## common ground

### diana wood conroy

The tangled sandstone heath on the low hills around Sydney, descending to lush rain forested valleys of palms and figs on small estuaries, was the first environment encountered by European settlers in the late eighteenth century. The area that was to become the Park was first drawn by navy surveyors from the ocean; to Cook and Bass sailing up the coast south of Sydney, trying to find a place to land, small drifts of smoke indicated the presence of human life.

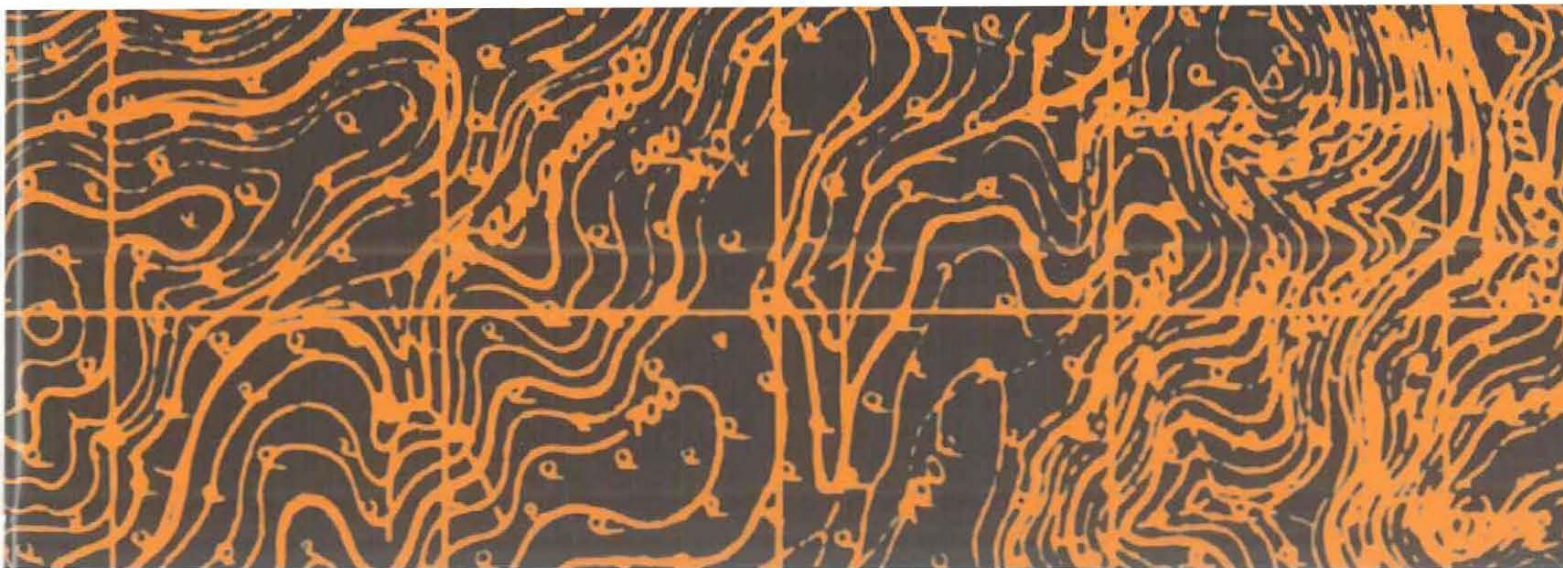
The landscape designated as 'The Royal National Park' in 1879 has become an integral part of the cultural geography of Sydney and its establishment showed great foresight. In the words of the enthusiastic trustees in the Official Guide published in 1893, the Park was formed to maintain the 'health and vigour' of the 'jaded citizens' from the dense suburbs of the city, then numbering 390000 people. The National Park was almost like an enormous back yard for these urban workers and was to be an area for 'recreation and pleasure'. A contained utopia of 'never wearying views of the ocean' with 'perpetual streamlets', with gorges 'thickly studded with majestic trees' provided an environment that would be 'pure and invigorating'. The Royal National Park originally was never envisioned as a pristine wilderness, but as a pleasure park, with 'improvements' to the existing landscape 'transfigured from primitive bush'.

Here are glimmers of the influential rhetoric from William Morris and John Ruskin, who in their prolific writings in the second half of the nineteenth century, worked to change the pollution and ugliness of Britain's industrial landscapes so that the 'working man' could enjoy the simple healthy pleasures of a 'natural' landscape. Such landscapes were also vital for the health and vigour of the arts, and provided, in the practices of William Morris, the natural materials for dyes, pigments and fibres needed to bring back to life the over-industrialised aesthetic of Victorian England.

The group of artists in 'Common Ground' exhibit works that demonstrate how complex the 'cultural geography' of the National Park has become in 2002. Apart from the troubling mention of 'secluded and inaccessible' Black Gin Range as a favourite Aboriginal camping ground in the Guide Book of 1893, the significant history of the area before European settlement is invisible. The Park is constituted as a picturesque landscape, waiting to be enjoyed by the burgeoning city, despite the presence of numerous rock engravings of mythological figures, animals, birds and creatures from the sea. In a more recent pamphlet about Jibbon Beach in the National Park there is a melancholy and restrained message from the La Perouse Aboriginal Land Council: 'This beach and adjacent creeks, inlets and woodlands once provided our ancestors with all their needs for a happy and healthy existence. The lives of the Dharawal people who lived here were controlled by a rich set of rituals under the influence of Daraulan, the 'All-Father', who has lived in the sky since creation. You will no longer hear the songs of the women as they fish in their bark canoes.....However, we know that you will still feel our people's presence as you approach this beautiful place where our stories are engraved on the rocks.'

For many Aboriginal people the processes of colonisation, very conscious in 1879, are still ongoing in 2002. One contested area is the separation of 'nature' and 'culture' in more recent areas set aside as National Parks, where the definition of wilderness is a place without human presence. In Aboriginal societies, by contrast, family relationships and relationships to country are not separate but entwined. There is a widespread anxiety among non-Aboriginal artists to engage with a 'postcolonial' landscape that recognises the continuing and profound transformation of landscape since European settlement, as well as comprehending an indigenous engagement with land that is not static, but also ongoing and transformative.





The inequities of indigenous Australia impose an implicit political position. In this exhibition Gordon Hookey puts the Koori perspective. (He describes himself as from the Waanyi people of North Queensland, a Murri artist.) Like most of the artists in this show, his initial strategy of reflecting on a beautiful natural world, without overt political content, was entirely interrupted and changed by the disastrous fires of December 2001 – January 2002. He arrived to work as artist in residence in the Park only a week after the cataclysm, when fires still smouldered underground and rumours about the arsonists expressed the anger and fear of the community, highlighted in the media. Gordon Hookey's vivid paintings question the certainties and hierarchies of middle Australia, and most interestingly, comment on the National Park through striking figures and narratives. Osama Bin Laden and Elvis Presley are powerful media icons who come to play a role in the saga of the bushfires in the National Park, like ancestor figures re-creating the distinguishing features of the land, leaving indelible landmarks through their implacable actions. Elvis Presley whirrs through the sky like a great Sky Father, while the grotesque earth spirits of the Arse-on-ists confer with filthy blasts. The iconic symbol of the golden sun is the one calm certainty in these vituperative stories.

It's as well to remember that in ancient Greek and Roman art the representation of gross obscenity was seen as a necessary gesture of protection that would ward off evil. Of all the artists in Common Ground, Hookey is closest to the ancient view of nature, where features of the landscape were personified as cosmic forces through unsettling myths.

The unpredictable action is quietly present in John Wolseley's work on paper. He has travelled like a nomad and immersed himself in threatened ecosystems in many countries. Although he is impressively informed by the structures used in the description of natural forms in botany or ornithology his practice transcends the strictly rational processes to immerse itself in the random, the

chance. Like throwing the I Ching, his vast paper was moved by himself and others in a kind of performance across the burnt and devastated bush.

'The paper felt firm and purposeful, held tight like a sail in the wind – a pure white expanse of paper. A giant litmus paper ready to register the tiniest powdering in the air or record the heavy impact of burnt black tree trunks... There were other times when I think we registered the effects of quite gentle rhythmic interplay between the two humans as they pulled the paper gently back and forth against the tree'. Transience is conveyed in fleeting marks, random dots, torn and pierced paper; as if each plant drew itself and let the wounded land speak in a graphic language. As well, detailed drawings investigate and scrutinise both the microscopic and macroscopic landscape, continuing the notion of 'creating knowledge' about a place. New green shoots appear like fireworks out of the black ground, reminding us that the very word 'nature' itself comes from the Latin 'nascere' to be born. It is this quality of regeneration after death, after the catastrophe of fire come again too soon to the Park so severely burnt in 1994, that defines the very idea of nature, always in metamorphosis, never predictable.

John Wolseley's intense observation of nature has an intimation of the Garden of Eden, of delight and surprise at the revelation of the seemingly familiar aspects of trees, creatures, or light perceived freshly. This is the breathtaking quality that one might see in a Samuel Palmer sketchbook from Shoreham in Kent in the 1820s. Palmer's religious view of 'nature as the sustaining impulse of the inner life' becomes blurred in an Australian setting. The seeming perversity and harshness of Australian environments to Europeans made it more difficult for inner and outer to reflect each other, until the hidden worlds of perception are opened up through a different kind of looking. Samuel Palmer survived his visionary years to live until 1887, so that he would have been still alive when the National Park was founded with such optimism for the future.



The National Park has been part of Idris Murphy's life since he was a child of seven, canoeing, fishing, camping and sailing along its coasts. Initially strongly moved by the almost mystical landscapes of English artists such as Palmer, he studied with William Scott, and searched out Graham Sutherland in England. He places himself in the modernist tradition of Sidney Nolan, and even more to Fred Williams who gave an intellectual formality to the huge repetitiveness of the Australian landscape. His paintings in *Common Ground* started from experiencing a strange sense of space and moonlight while staying in a shack at Era, and the late evening at The Basin. Mood and intuition hint at forms which have a starting point in observation but become painterly metaphors for the memory of a place, almost like the mind maps referred to by Aboriginal artists. As a colourist his hues are smoky and often darkened, with a sudden flash of pure red or green. 'What is interesting is when two things come together in a dichotomy and truth reveals itself'. He distances himself from the colonial idea of 'picturesque' landscape with its fixed viewpoint and deep space, not least in his choice of a square format.

At the same time as the imperial drive for colonisation came the new scientific impetus to describe and classify every living species through rational organisation, in new Natural History Museums. A major European tradition in the representation of Australian landscape has been through observation, through scientific drawing of species and of topography, all vital visual documents containing precise information that contributed to the scientific understanding and mapping of Australia in the nineteenth century. In a sense, these drawings actually created knowledge through their minute description of difference, and were fundamental to scientific comparison and classification. Sue Blanchfield and Liz Jeneid, textile artists, both approached the National Park through its vegetation.

Liz Jeneid at first did many walks within the Park, before the fires came, trying to locate 'settler's flax'; perhaps to weave baskets. All that changed after the fires, when much of the Park was closed and inaccessible. She was struck by the remarkable blackness of the devastation, by the skeletal quality of the bush with all its leafy flesh stripped back. Dead leaves floating through the ashy air had been a sign for all of us in the Illawarra that the fires were very near. Like an archaeological site hidden aspects of the land were

revealed - views that had been blocked by vegetation were suddenly vistas, old tracks lost under bush were illuminated in the stark ground in all their idiosyncrasy. The very subtle shifts of texture and surface of this vulnerable and brittle tracery of rocks and burnt vegetation is reflected in the nuances of her woodblock prints.

Sue Blanchfield's instinct was to draw a curtain around the intensively used Park, and leave it alone for awhile. Her curved curtain is made up of rectangles of silk organza dyed with the soft and luminous colours from native plants, with the mordants alum, copper and iron. Over these shimmering tones of yellows, pale greys, rich browns, olive greens, is printed a branching pattern which is in fact the map of the waterways of the Park, offering a way in to the country. For Sue Blanchfield the Linnaean classification (the plants she used are listed on each dyed rectangle) imposed an order on the vegetation before we could learn their Aboriginal names. The silk fabric is semi-transparent, and its delicacy is a metaphor for the fragility of the country and its mesh of plants. The artist was struck by the cathartic burning away of all foliage; suddenly the naked ground was littered with years of glass, impervious to fire, thrown into the bush and hidden until now.

Ian Gentle's linear wooden sculptures reflect the creaturely. Somewhere between plant and animal they appear almost as found objects, on the edge between nature and culture. This mysterious technique of joining wood that looks as fluid as metal makes the images seem inevitable, a new species perhaps that has been somehow overlooked. The great stick insects found in the bush are invisible until they move, and then one gasps at the mimicry of their jointed twig-like limbs so exactly matching the eucalypt sticks on which they crouch. His sculpture almost has a sound, evocative of musical instruments that might hum, rustle or throb just below the threshold of hearing.

Sitting quietly in an ordinary patch of bush at dawn - suddenly there is a remarkable burst of light, or shadows, as clouds and wind change the view. Or an astonishing bird, never seen before, may alight carelessly right beside you - you become part of the scene not separate from it. John Wolseley refers to an 'aleatory' quality meaning 'dependent on uncertainties, on the throw of a

dice'. He describes a train of events – 'the paper blows from its board and twists itself in the wind, scraping on the black twiggy fingers of the burnt shrubs, revealing its own patterns.' The augurs, priests in Roman times, would have interpreted that 'skein of ibis' twisting across the sky as indicative of crucial future events. It is nice to consider that artists may take on this prophetic role.

Jelle Van Den Berg's watercolours have this quality of innocence and surprise with a surface of intricate subtleties and tones that are a metaphor for the changing light, the knotted textures and flailing dots along the coastal bush. His respect for 'mimesis', the representation and mirroring of reality, derives from his experience of a long tradition in Dutch painting, of artists working in all weathers beside canals and flat lands dominated by sky. The artist in Jelle Van den Berg's work is a kind of Don Quixote, impelled by an impossible love for an imagined lady. This seemingly ridiculous but passionate emotion allows an expression and simplicity that a more 'reasonable' approach could not.

Jelle Van Den Berg and Jacky Redgate have a history of working collaboratively. Jacky Redgate usually constructs her complex tableaux in the studio and does not work directly with landscape. By contrast, the structures that we deal with in trying to describe or understand landscape, are full of relevance for her. The photograph has conditioned the way we comprehend the natural world, but the photographic systems that produce a panorama, or a vista, require complex overlappings and perceptual shifts in vision. Sometimes predictable elements, like trees do not line up — they fall apart. An artist's task is to monitor closely the very act of perception, and allow the unexpected to happen, to question the systems of representation that seem so inevitable. The area around the Dance Hall at Audley, part of the facilities for holiday makers in the National Park, is the focus for her work, as it is for Jelle Van Den Berg. The courage to accept the random and wandering, the almost childlike wonder at a particular form, the mysterious chance event, is one of the most liberating aspects of working in and around a specific place. Hire one of those boats and row up the river, see what turns up and take it from there.

Bringing together this exceptional group of artists to work in the Royal National Park underlines how many facets there are to representing a specific place, how many viewpoints inform the notion of a particular landscape, a particular common ground. 'Nature' and 'culture' are consistently matted together in this distinctive piece of geography. Each artist surprises us with another dimension on what we thought we knew. The inspired founders of the National Park should be delighted with such a 're-creation'. The marvel of the Park is how many possibilities it presents, how it can never be pinned down in one system; there is always another perspective, another way of relating to the land that may be just around the next headland, up the next gully.

**Dr Diana Wood Conroy**

**Associate Professor, Visual Arts, University of Wollongong**

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ian gentle

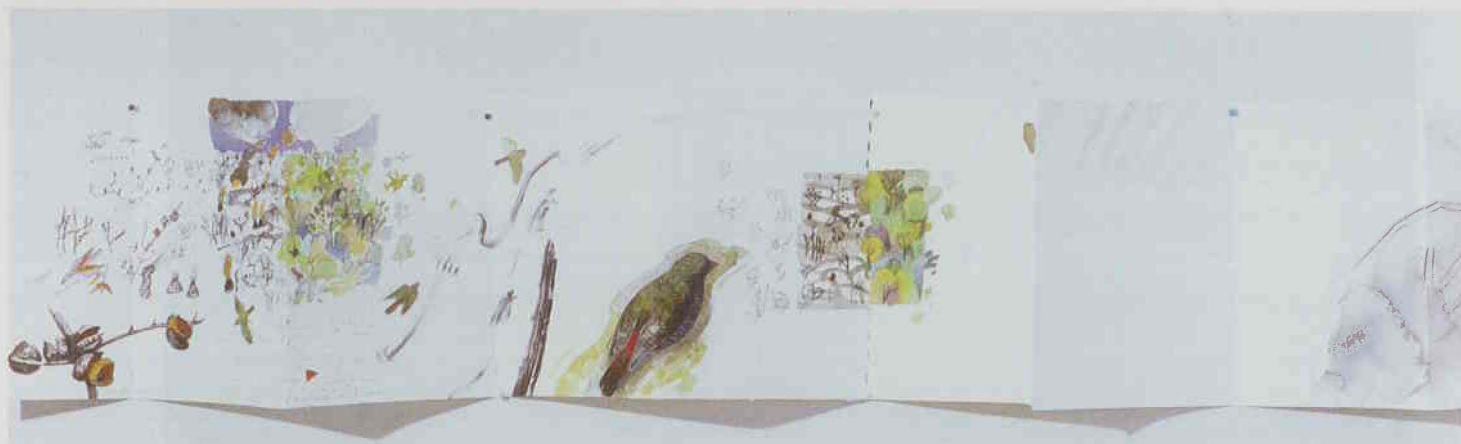
mozzies

2002

Acacia roots and eucalypt

90cm x 36cm x 31cm , 135cm x 42cm x 38cm

Courtesy the artist and Stella Downer Fine Art, Sydney



john walseley

reporello of six months

in the royal national park – no. 2

2002

dimension variable, watercolour and carbonised wood on paper

Courtesy the artist and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney





idris murphy

going down and up to stanwell park

2002

61cm x 61cm

Synthetic polymer paint and mixed media on board

**Courtesy the artist and King St Gallery on Burton**



liz jeneid

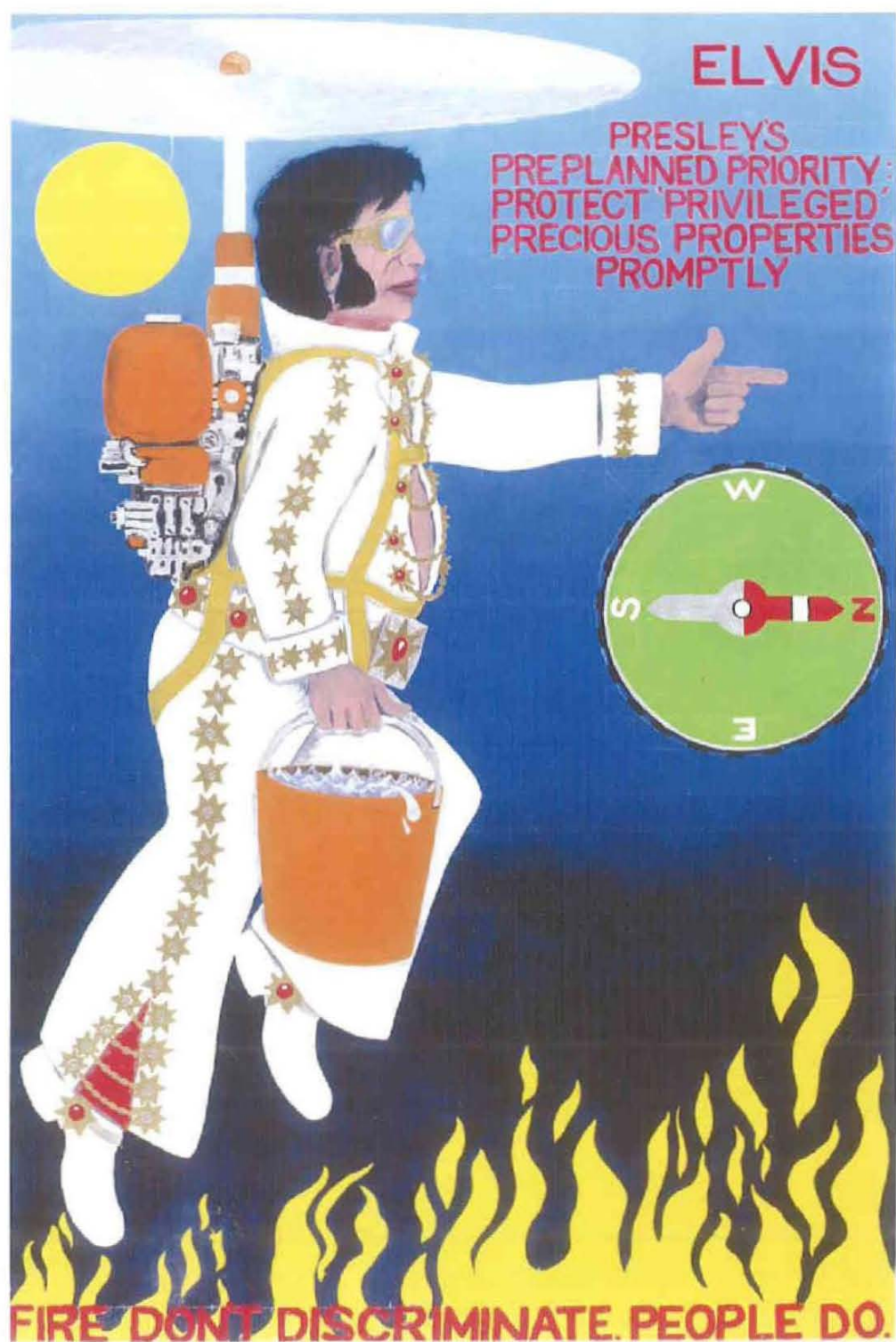
bushfire #2

2002

70cm x 70cm, linocut and synthetic polymer paint on paper

Courtesy the artist





gordon hookey

ELVIS

2002

183cm x 122cm

Oil on canvas

Courtesy the artist



sue blanchfield

diffusion

2002

720 cm x 330 cm

silk organza, natural dyes, glass, pigments

Courtesy the artist





jelle van den berg

picnic advice

from the series 'Smoke Spots', a collaboration with Jacky Redgate

2002

20cm x 22cm

Watercolour on paper

Courtesy the artist and Stella Downer Fine Art, Sydney



jacky redgate

parallax

from the series 'Smoke Spots', a collaboration with Jelle van den Berg

2002

transparency, work in progress

Courtesy the artist and Sherman Galleries, Sydney



# parklife: histories of human habitats in the royal national park

tom sear

## CHORUS

All The People  
So Many People  
And They All Go Hand In Hand  
Hand In Hand Through Their Parklife

## Know What I Mean?<sup>1</sup>

The Royal National Park has sustained a feral ecology of human uses since its invention in 1879.

One of the most recent is the most extraordinary. The Royal National Park is Osama Bin Laden's cover. Osama Bin Laden is hiding near the Royal National Park. He lives on a property close to the Upper Causeway, on the way to Waterfall – right on the urban bush interface. He was discovered by local Bush Fire Brigades during the recent fires. According to members of the Helensburgh crew it really is him.<sup>2</sup> During the fires of Black Xmas 2001, the two-way radios of local Firies crackled with reports about Tora Bora. What a place to hide. Mind you, Osama was clear in one of his home videos that Australia was gonna cop it. Tellingly, unlike the fires of January 1994, when 90% of the 'Nasho' was destroyed, this time the Park was in comparison relatively unscathed. Although Toyota, Bin Laden's vehicle of choice, did fund the Post Fire Vertebrate Fauna Survey after the 1994 fires.<sup>3</sup> Osama's place is one of the many private blocks that encroached on the original alienation of land for a Park granted, by the Grace of God, and Queen Victoria. The original grant draws a line from O. Bin Laden's block across to H.J. Collaery's farm at Garie, the border of the Pacific is interrupted by J.T Hughes's place in the Parish of Wattamolla and to the west by the Village of Heathcote, and to the north, on Port Hacking, myriad separate titles, largely held by Constable, Simpson, Newcombe and Byrne.<sup>4</sup>

On the freehold lots of these latter men, who have left this life, stand the current townships of Bundeena and Maianbar.<sup>5</sup> While not adverse to using the names of these townships as a subterfuge at

the gate to avoid paying the entry fee, these places are seen through the eyes of those residing at the Appalachian ends of the Park, as sites of decadence and debauchery. A bohemian Sylvania Waters, Bundeena and Maianbar conjure up love trysts, Dirty Weekenders and scenes such as those depicted in *Puberty Blues*.

The National Park may have been the second in the world (and the first gazetted) after Yellowstone, but I'd bet it's the only one with an RSL slap bang in the middle of it - fitting for a Park so enamoured of cheap booze. In the 1970s many of the Bundeena crowd held loose happenings at Wattamolla, and the town being the residence of so many QANTAS employees, 747 flyovers sometimes featured. But the presence of Bundeena has meant that the Park is always open 24/7. In the late 1960s, the Royal National Park Superintendent, Mr G. Martin said that the peak of activity of vandals and sentimental couples had been reached. He stated that 'wild parties' were held in the Park every Friday and Saturday night. Bottles were smashed, picnic tables used for firewood and streams despoiled. He noted however, that those prosecuted came from all over Sydney, 'not one special area'.<sup>6</sup>

There was something special about one group, but its not clear what. In 1949, the (then) Minister for Local Government and President of the National Park Trust, Mr Cahill, said he was concerned about the activities of a society which practised a 'primitive type of life' in the National Park each weekend. Cahill said that members of the society lived off the country, snaring animals and destroying saplings to create shelter. He said that the National Park would take a serious view of offences, 'particularly by organised groups'.<sup>7</sup>

One particular 'organised group' was to break the by-laws in a big way 9 years later. On April Fools Day 1958, the body of one Pasquale Brancatisano was found sprawled on the roadway next to his expensive Ford Zephyr at Governor Game Lookout above Garie. Legendary crime reporter, 'Bondi' Bill Jenkins was quick on the scene with detectives, one of whom remarked, 'He's an Italian.

This looks like a Mafia killing to me.' Apart from the continental ballistics, the killing did have other hallmarks of a trip to Chicago. Brancatisano had copped the first bullet in the mouth, the next three in the side of the head, and then he was kicked over and a classic Murder Inc. contemptuous coup de grace was the fifth shot into the base of his skull. The cops were stumped. Pasquale did not seem to be part of the underworld, although he must have been supplementing his income as a bootmaker to pay for his flash car and the many romances with beautiful women which had split up his marriage. Brancatisano was murdered between 9.30 and 10pm on a Monday night. On the night of his death he was spotted at 6.20pm with two young 'Australian women, one a slim blonde' and another 'foreigner' at an Engadine service station. Another 'mystery man' was seen standing near a 1954 to 1956 model grey or light blue Morris Minor sedan parked on the Northern side of the road leading to Garie beach. He was described as 'foreign looking 'about 38, 5ft. 10in. to 6ft, slim and sallow, and his black, brushed hair was receding at the temples.<sup>8</sup>

The Brancatisano murder has never been solved. The Park being accessible from Sydney and open at night makes it favourable to those wishing to bury mysteries and we don't know what other mysteries might slumber there. However, the Brancatisano case does spotlight two significant themes of park usage - wogs and cars. Not that these two ideas are inextricably linked, but mobility and access are a constant in post-war park usage. In 1969, Superintendent Mr G. Martin complained about stolen cars being dumped off Governor Game lookout, and dumped cars have always been present over the cliffs of the southern end of the Park. Indeed, anyone who has driven through the Park from the South at night can understand the exciting motoring that the Park offers a car thief. Stolen cars have also presented another hazard - fire.<sup>9</sup> But for post-war Park management, the car has been a necessary evil.<sup>10</sup> Fees for parking of motor vehicles in the Park provided the main income stream for the Trust. Post-war annual reports consistently list parking fees out-stripping government grants at ratio of almost 3 to 1.<sup>11</sup> Presumably income was also received from advertisements produced by Holden in the late 1950s, and later the 1962 Ford Falcons, in the Royal.<sup>12</sup> These ads emphasised mobility, freedom and natural beauty, all dreams of the post war era. The latest VW TV advertisement featuring the Royal conjures the remnants of such an ideal.

Another contemporary television advertisement with the Royal as backdrop deals with two later twentieth century Australian themes - feminism and multiculturalism. In a spoof of the traditional tampon ad, a woman on a beach takes the soccer ball of some nearby 'ethnic' players and boots it out to sea. Presumably this implies that wogs should take their ball and go and play somewhere else.

The National Park was declared in 1879 but while Australia wasn't a federated nation until 1901, the Park was designed to be seen through a nationalistic lens. Of course the originators may have thought NSW was to become an independent nation itself. But it was all projection. The introduction to the 1915 Official Guide to the National Park of New South Wales declared in the 'history of nations, how brief a span is a century!' The introduction went on that driven by the conveniences of transportation, 'at no time in the world's history has civilization brought about such an alteration of human existence'. The book offered a guide to the 'pleasure seeking tourist' but also an 'awareness of a deeper and more serious duty' - that of the preserving of 'virgin' country in just the condition experienced by the First Fleet. In a world of constant change, no such change will be permitted in the Park.<sup>13</sup> So, the natural heritage Park was set up not only to demonstrate the conditions that the White Man encountered on colonisation, but also a mirror of progress and achievement in those 'conditions', and subsequently a landscape of national identity.

If the Park is understood through a nationalist frame, the impact of Australians from other nations breaks through the borders of that perception. Or does it? A survey conducted at Wattamolla between 25th and 28th of December 1998 found that 42 languages were used in the area over the Christmas break.<sup>14</sup> Rangers appear poorly resourced in managing this cultural diversity. In an email survey of Sydney NPWS staff they complained that 'Asians have no regard for total fire bans and will only put out BBQs if threatened with fine, gaol or the fire hose', 'that Muslim/Middle Eastern people dispose of heat beads inappropriately', 'Bosnians ignore signage', whilst in the case of Islander peoples' visits to Kurnell National Park, they moved concrete seating furniture which could only be moved back with heavy equipment.<sup>15</sup> Some see these differences as confrontations of cultural difference. Historian Martin Thomas argues that the diverse cultural practices in the Royal National Park are re-inscribing the meaning of the landscape. He sees his study of a tradition going back at least 30 years, the Macedonian Christmas party at Audley, as an example of one unrecognised history of using Sydney's Parkland.<sup>16</sup>

On the other hand, the Macedonian Christmas party reflects a use of the Park as laid down by the 'public men' of 1879 - the enjoyment of pleasure grounds. The 'statesmen of the day' saw the 'health of the people as the primary consideration of good government' and the necessity of cities for 'breathing spaces' and 'parks and pleasure grounds as places of recreation'.<sup>17</sup> Audley has always been the centre of pleasure seeking. The early trustees ensured facilities were available for this purpose. A causeway was built to raise the level of the Hacking River, Park headquarters built, a rail line into the Park was constructed in 1886 along with a horse drawn valet service whilst boat hire facilities were made



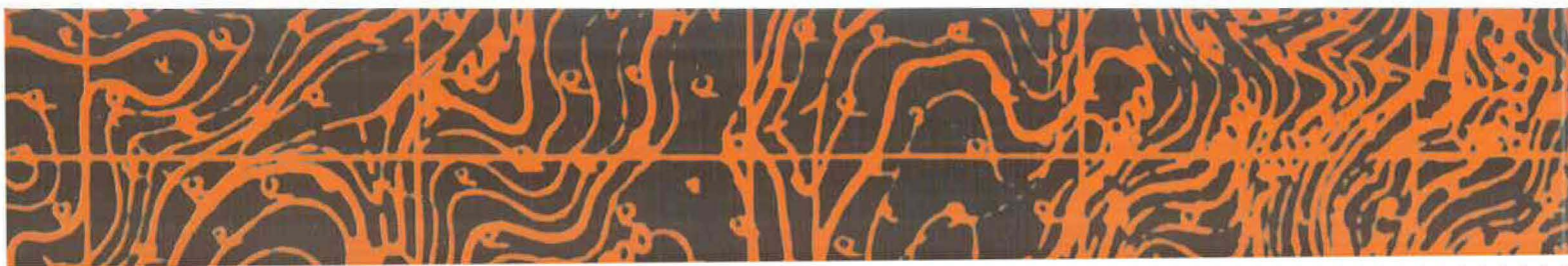
available. By 1915 Warumbul and 'The Rest', also known as Allambie, were constructed and the National Park Ferry Service was established as were tracks for easy rambles in the rainforest.

The Trustees also acclimatised feral animals. Between 1885 and 1888 the Trust introduced deer and goats at Deer Park (now Gundamaian). The first Grant gave permission for trustees to have a zoological park, but we can assume that didn't mean the whole Park. The animals broke out of their confines and their progeny spread as far west as the Blue Mountains and as far south as Nowra. There has been endless hot air and scientific analysis of the problem.<sup>18</sup> Anyone who has been in a quiet area of the Park has witnessed these massive herds on the move, and some others have been involved in fine sport shooting close to home. In one incident two blokes found a fellow standing over a freshly killed Rusa Deer at Era. Determined to make a citizen's arrest they tackled the man and after a struggle tied him to the rafters of the surf club and then went to get the Police. Only then did it emerge that the culprit was Detective Craig Chapman from Penrith.<sup>19</sup> The detective should have considered more mellow poaching pursuits such as fishing or pigshooting. In the late nineteenth century trout, perch and tench were introduced to the park, by Trustee Farnell.<sup>20</sup> If the hapless policeman had kept dogs pig hunting is favourable as Bucky Blackwell's Lilyvale boars escaped decades ago and continue to flourish.<sup>21</sup>

Of course you can shoot feral animals, but you can't get rid of people that easily. (Well you can, but...) The southern portion of the Park has had active European usage since early colonisation. For this reason this section was not included in the Park until recently. The forests between Helensburgh and the coast were full with Red Cedar and Turpentine. Lady Wakehurst Drive is an old loggers' track with timber either snigged to the coast and transported by boat or floated down the Hacking. The Premier Mr Carr's favourite Sydney Bushwalking track, the 'Burgh Track, possibly provided access for loggers to supplies of booze and women and later provided locals access to huts at Era, Garie and Tin Hut. A great uncle told a story of a chap from Helensburgh who set out to a weekend at Era and upon arrival realised he had no tobacco and walked back to get it. Such perseverance and tenacity were required by those who built the original cabins/shacks/huts in what now is the Park.

As at 1 July 1992 there were 234 huts in the Park. At Bonnie Vale there were 31 and then they spread down the coast at four locations -- at Little Garie[Tin Hut] (22), South Era (94) Burning Palms (30) and Bulgo (57).<sup>22</sup> These huts have significant cultural, architectural and heritage value. The Bulgo Huts, for example, mostly sprang up between 1930 and 1932. Between these years Helensburgh's Metropolitan Colliery was shut down due to the depression. Prior to the shutdown miners' families had tent pegged spots at Bulgo for use during the annual 10 day break from Metrop. When the shut-down happened pioneers, such as Tom Collins, built huts either on the Crown Reserve known as 'The Green' or sought permission and built on the private land. Here people survived without regular work by growing vegies, catching rabbits and possum. After this time, families maintained constant use of their huts. In 1960 Wollongong Council purchased the land and in 1976 transferred ownership to the NPWS.<sup>23</sup> These hut owners are the subject of an occupation license issued under section 151(1)(f) of the National Parks and Wildlife Act of 1974 and pay rent. Talking around the traps of the 'Burgh and with members of the Bulgo Protection League, the RNP Coastal Cabin Conservation Communities and the Cabin Communities Landcare Group Inc., the impression was gained that NPWS's strategy for removal of the huts was to rent them out -- enforcing exorbitant rental demands upon the owners.

The politics of the hut communities' relationship with the Parks reflect wider and historical understandings of what the Park is for. These multiple understandings were there at the beginning. Premier Sir John Robertson had been responsible for the Squatters Acts of 1861 which reduced the large squatter's hold on land, so he was aware of the power of land acts to solve broader social issues. Creating the Park, Robertson killed many birds with one stone. The NSW Zoological Society had put pressure on the Government for a space for the acclimatisation movement which wished to introduce multiple species, there was huge pressure from the 1870s to build the Illawarra rail line and the temperance and social reform movements were pressing for recreational space. By legislating for the Park Robertson gave a space for the Zoological mob, encouraged capital investment for the railway and satisfied the call for open parkland.<sup>24</sup>





# parklife: histories of human habitats in the royal national park

Contemporary Hut communities draw on older cultural languages, older even than the Park itself. Indeed the Park's design drew on an older understanding of people's ownership. It is a discourse framed from eighteenth and nineteenth century British working class radicalism and the rights of the common man to access public space. This was expressed via an understanding of the medieval Commons filtered through the languages of aristocracy and radical British understandings of public space. The Commons in Britain had experienced a renaissance in the 1860s with the formation of the Commons Preservation Society, along with the Open Spaces movement, which sought to prevent enclosure of commons around metropolitan areas. Robertson's model in terms of the Park was the creation of Hampstead Heath in 1872.<sup>25</sup> For the aristocracy of the Gentleman's Park Robertson appointed 11 Trustees.<sup>26</sup> The Royal was added to the title when the Queen toured in 1954 on her way to the Gong. However, Robertson did not merely draw from an English model but wrapped up the package in an American conception of a National Park - that of Yellowstone, which began in 1872. The Trust copped a lot of criticism throughout the twentieth century due to its perception of conservation, particularly the logging debates of the 1920s. In 1944 Australian war historian C.E.W Bean called for an adoption of an American model of Park management.<sup>27</sup> When the National Parks and Wildlife Act was passed in 1974 this is exactly what had happened. Although locals had first sighted Yankees in the Park in 1967,<sup>28</sup> Elvis the helicopter is only the most recent American influence hovering over The Park.

The journey of Elvis across the Park during Black Xmas reflected much deeper intersections, traverses and journeys associated with water. The Park is traditional land of the Dharawal nation. The Dharawal are three states in one nation - the Sweet Water people who lived in the headwaters inland, the Bitter Water people who inhabited the tidal rivers and bays and the Saltwater people who possessed the land below the cliffs on the coast. The Park was wintering grounds for the Sweet and Bitter Water people, of Liverpool and Campbelltown, who had food rights over the country but not of the coast, the Salties -- the people who maintained the country during summer for the others peoples.<sup>29</sup> It may be a long bow to draw parallels between contemporary use patterns and traditional indigenous understandings of country, with permanent inhabitants on the coast and in Port Hacking, and temporary seasonal visits across the rest of the park, but it is tempting. The Park is alive and well, and will continue to resist straightjacket of controlled nature.

**Tom Sear, Assistant Curator, Liverpool Regional Museum.**

Tom grew up in Helensburgh.

## Notes:

- 1 Blur Parklife, 1994.
- 2 Conversation in the Public Bar of The Centennial Hotel, Helensburgh.
- 3 Debbie Andrew, *Post Fire Vertebrate Fauna Survey - Royal and Heathcote National Parks and Garawarra State Recreation Area*, Report to the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, Sydney South Region, May 2001. p. 11
- 4 Land Grant Register Book, Vol. 821, Fol. 755.
- 5 Further research is required, these freehold leases in the North may have 'retreats' for the wealthy, possibly for politicians. See Geoff Ashley, *The Royal National Park Cabins Conservation Plan*, Draft, September 1994. NPWS, Hurstville, 1994. p. 24.
- 6 'Minister to Clamp Down on Vandals', *Sun Herald*, June 22, 1969.p15.
- 7 'Primitive Life in National Park' *The Telegraph* 28th of May, 1949. p56. It is unknown whether Cahill is referring to pioneer naturalist work at Hell Hole.
- 8 'Murder Puzzle Mark of 'Mafia' TRUTH, Sunday April 6, 1958. p. 3. Bill Jenkins with Norm Lipson and Tony Barnao, *As Crime Goes By...The Life and Times of 'Bondi' Bill Juenkings*, Ironbark Press, Sydney, 1992. pp.256-257.
- 9 '150 Acres Burnt Out - abandoned car set alight causes bushfire', *The Daily Telegraph*, September 7, 1972. p.36
- 10 Motorcyclists of course particularly enjoy the road of the Park, although the crackdown on Trail Bikes in the Sutherland Shire from April this year may curtail some two stroke pleasures.
- 11 See The Royal National Park Trust, Annual Report for the Year Ending 30th June, 1957. Income table. The Royal National Park Trust, 86th Annual Report for the Year Ending 30th June, 1966. See Financial Position, The Royal National Park Trust, 86th Annual Report for the Year Ending 30th June, 1966.
- 12 See Picture Files, Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW, Macquarie Street.
- 13 The Trustees, *Official Guide to the National Park of New South Wales*, Sydney, 1915. Introduction.
- 14 Jennifer Bolwell, Senior Ranger (Neighbour Relations) Sydney South Region. Quoted in Martin Thomas, *A Multicultural Landscape: National Parks and the Macedonian Experience*, National Parks and Wildlife Service and Pluto press, Sydney, 2001. p. 29.
- 15 email dated 14 February 2000, NPWS file no. F/3731 vol. 1. in Thomas, *A Multicultural Landscape*, p. 19
- 16 Martin Thomas, *A Multicultural Landscape: National Parks and the Macedonian Experience*, National Parks and Wildlife Service and Pluto press, Sydney, 2001. p. 29
- 17 The Trustees, *An Official Guide to the National Park of New South Wales*, Government Printer, Sydney, 1893.
- 18 See References in *Royal National Park, Heathcote National Park and Garawarra State Recreation Area, Draft Plan of Management*, NPWS, Sydney, 1994. p72.
- 19 'Detective Denies Assaults', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4th May, 1993. p. 5.
- 20 The Trustees, *An Official Guide to the National Park of New South Wales*, Government Printer, Sydney, 1893. p.17.
- 21 A successful Apiary lease continues to operate in the park and is held by a member of the Illawarra Amateur Beekeeping Association.
- 22 Geoff Ashley, *The Royal National Park Cabins Conservation Plan*, Draft, September 1994. NPWS, Hurstville, 1994. p. 23.
- 23 Geoff Ashley, *The Royal National Park Cabins Conservation Plan*, Draft, September 1994. NPWS, Hurstville, 1994. p. 23.
- 24 Ashley, *The Royal National Park Cabins*.p26.
- 25 In discussion with Dr Ian Hoskins author of *Cultivating the Citizen: The Cultural Politics of Parks and Gardens in Sydney 1880-1930*, PhD, University of Sydney, 1996. See also Rt. Hon. G.Shaw Lefevre MP English Commons and Forests : The Story of the Battle During the Last Thirty Years for Public Rights Over Commons and Forests of England and Wales, Cassell and Company, London, Paris Melbourne, 1894.
- 26 The Trustees, *An Official Guide to the National Park of New South Wales*, Government Printer, Sydney, 1893.
- 27 C.E.W Bean *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10th of July 1944. p. 2
- 28 Fire management strategy in the sister park Yellowstone have recently been attacked see. *National Geographic* Volume 175, No. 2, February 1989. Discussion with resident of Helensburgh/Bulgo
- 29 Frances Bodkin, D'harawal Traditional Council. The land called the Royal National Park transects several Aboriginal Land Council borders. These include Southern Metropolitan, La Perouse, Wollongong and Tharawal. The Park itself is under the responsibility of La Perouse Land Council.



# credits & acknowledgments

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School of Geosciences Map Collection, Faculty of Science

University of Wollongong

University of Wollongong

NSW 2522

Tel: 02 4221 3555

Hazelhurst Regional Gallery and Arts Centre

782 Kingsway

Gymea NSW 2227

Tel: 02 8536 5700

